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I, Fareeha

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Summary

Android Pharah Five is undergoing simulations and tests before entering service. Her datacore is filled with cryptic memories of an old love and a woman that warms her cold machine heart.

Angela Ziegler is a retired Spec Ops working as a Navy medic, called on the most important android production station, unwillingly risking to face old wounds.

FILE 01

>*Booting sequence initiated.*

>*Main OS loading.*

>*Checking peripherals and data settings...*

Pharah opened her eyes. White noise filled her vision, random machine code organising into concrete instructions as her system loaded up.

She felt a surge of energy as her power plant went from idle to active.

>*Booting sequence complete.*

>*Calibration and world analysis required.*

Clicking and whirring, her optical devices turned the world around her into focus.

Her big, yellowish eyes scanned around, gathering as much data as possible.

She was inside a small room, her usual maintenance shop. Cables and mechanical arms were all around. Screens and diagrams filled a wall on her right.

“Good morning, Pharah Five.” A voice behind her. “Can you hear me?”

Pharah could. She sent a burst of data through her connections.

A screen chirped nearby.

“Excellent. How are you doing today?”

Slowly moving her head, she panned around, trying to look at the man speaking to her.

>*Activating post boot diagnostics.*

A middle aged scientist was smiling at her. Donning a lab coat, he was checking something on his holographic projectors implanted near his eyes.

>*Diagnostics complete. No damage found. (1) error found.*

>*Angela...where are you...*

“Pharah? Everything all right?”

“Diagnostics complete. No damage sustained. Booting sequence gave zero errors. This unit is awaiting instructions.” Answered Pharah, her monotone voice resonating in the room.

The scientist frowned, checking a tablet in his pocket.

“I’m not getting any report though. Is there a bug in the synchronization program?”

“Running diagnostics...”

“Don’t bother, I’m going to override and manually extract the data.”

>Alert: increased brain usage. Please contact your supervisor.

> Alert: unauthorized activation of emotional matrix. Please contact your supervisor.

>Warning: synth-amygadala is active, stress relief programs are suggested.

>Warning: adrenaline levels are increasing. Cause: Error. Contact your supervisor.

Pharah heard the scientist cursing at an error in her main settings panel, denying him access.

>Purge error report.

>Error count: 1; Angela Ziegler. Alert: unauthorized access of emotional matrix.

>Purge error report Y/N?

>Purging...

“Finally! Stupid machine not working...”

Pharah felt an external entity entering her conscience.

The scientist’s diagnostic program overrode all of her functions and searched everywhere, looking into her very code.

It found only a blank error report.

“It appears this stupid thing is broken.” Said the man “it didn’t retrieve the error log and I had to access Pharah directly. Here take it and bring me another one if you please.”

Pharah watched as another man took the small tablet from the scientist’s hand and strode off her field of view with it.

“I’m sorry Pharah, I did not mean to waste time.”

The scientist walked behind her, tinkering with cables and blocking clamps attached to her back.

“Wanna go out for a stroll? We can resume from where we left last week.”

“Activating locomotive functions.” Answered Pharah “Awaiting clamp disengage and power uncoupling.”

Pharah felt all her weight on her legs as the mechanism holding her was shut down.

>Switching power mode to internal.

>Navigation systems online.

>De-syncing with supervisor data module.

Feeling small and defenceless as the main cortical cable was unplugged, she severed her connection with the servers and external information storage.

“Very well Pharah.” The scientist quickly reached a sturdy bulk door and opened it.

“I, doctor William May” he intoned, turning to face Pharah “grant authorization to HRA Unit Pharah Five to exit the maintenance room and partake in its standard simulations.

“Voice and facial recognition accepted.” Answered Pharah. “Digital signature check positive.

Proceeding as planned.”

Pharah Five looked down on her body, stretching her synthetic, muscular frame.

She followed doctor May out of the room.

>Warning: unauthorized access to memory black box.

>Warning: restricted data compromised. Please contact your supervisor immediately.

>Error: I will find you Angela...

The aggressive chirp of the alarm woke Angela from an agitated sleep.

Trying to remember the last images of her dream slowly leaving her conscience, the woman sat in her small bed.

“Okay, I get it! I’m awake! Snooze!” blurted, silencing the alarm with the voice command.

She activated her retinal HUD and checked the time.

I guess this is it then.

She got up from the bed and headed into the small bathroom in her room.

Washing her face, she felt a sharp pain in her guts as she looked at her back in the mirror.

Her spinal implant was still there, a pair of stumps grafted near her shoulder blades.

The usual damage report came up in her field of view, asking for wing repairs.

No matter how much she tried, the same warning came up every morning, reminding her of that day.

I’m sorry little buddy, I can’t.

She dismissed the report with a nod and flexed the stumps.

The fried synth-nerves were starting to repair themselves she noticed as small bursts of pain were sent through her back.

I’ll have to remove them completely.

She thought, only to regret it immediately after.

Angela took a shower, then donned a simple white flight suit and stepped outside her room.

The transport starship was in its early morning cycle, so the woman met very few people in the residential decks.

Going through identical corridors full of single room habitations, she reached the main elevator shaft.

Her ocular implant was scanned by a security drone and accepted to the command levels of the vessel.

It's been so long. Why, of all the doctors in the whole damn 'verse, it had to be me?

She brooded over and over in her elevator trip, traversing the whole ship as the small cab took her from one end to the other of the colossal space frame.

Arriving at the Command deck, she produced a cigarette from a pocket and lit it.

"Attention please, we kindly remind you that smoking is not permitted outside of specified areas."

"Yeah well, tough luck."

Angela slowly walked to a security post, where a couple guards were waiting.

"You know, there's a reason we put those warnings." Said a bulky man armed with a short machine gun. "Besides, it hurts your lungs doc."

"That's my line son." Grinned Angela, speeding past him and stopping at the desk.

A young officer gave her a small pad, where Angela signed her name off.

"I can't believe we have the actual special forces ops Angela Ziegler onboard" said the officer
"It's an honour to meet you".

Angela raised an eyebrow, smiling faintly.

"And you're going to Gibraltar Station! State of the art technology, great view over a gas giant and humanoid android production. I hear you can even buy your personal bot there. They say they can make it look like a real person."

Angela sighed, waving at the officer to make her move.

"Yeah whatever. Come on, just tell me why am I here."

The officer shrugged.

"Very well, this way Mercy."

Angela inhaled, then released a thick cloud of smoke in the officer's eyes.

"Honey, the last one who called me like that had a really bad encounter with Jesse." She said.

"I'm sorry? Jesse?"

Angela unzipped a pocket on her leg and showed a large, bullet fed, double action revolver.

"This is Jesse. Now, unless you want to know it personally, don't ever fucking call me Mercy again. We clear?"

"Y-yes ma'am."

"Good, now let's get moving sweetie."

FILE 02

The hallway was brightly lit. All kinds of human crew members and robots were going on their ways.

Pharah was registering everything, her eyes recording and analyzing everything that entered her view.

She was walking with doctor May and a security guard.

The guard carried a single energy pistol in a holster strapped to his right leg.

Pharah focused on the faces of the people walking towards her.

All were staring, making room for them to pass.

“Interrogative” she intoned “human personnel is eyeing this group constantly. Their pupils and body language show concern.”

Doctor May laughed.

“Yes, well, there have been problems with some of the older Pharah units, but we solved them. Don’t worry about the people.”

They soon reached an elevator and stepped in.

A big mirror was placed near the control panel.

Pharah stared at her own figure.

Her frame was an almost exact copy of a human body, even though she could notice the synthetical skin’s stitches and a couple of mechanical joints.

She was wearing a blue skin-tight bodysuit, with small holes for her ports and access points scattered at key locations on her body.

A tattoo near her right eye caught her attention.

Her database recognised it as the “Eye of Horus” and it masked a quick response code.

Easily reading it even if mirrored, Pharah displayed the code on her HUD:

‘Human Reconstruction Android mark III, model Pharah Five, built in Gibraltar Station, Human Empire, 2429. Property of Athena Robotics.’

“Something troubling you, Pharah?”

Doctor May’s voice was calming and Pharah turned to look at him.

“No error detected.”

The man smiled, looking in turn at the mirror.

“She used to be so strong and brave...”

The elevator stopped.

The three stepped outside and into a small room, barely lit and with two guards.

“Good day. I’m here for the scheduled test.”

One of the guards smiled and produced a small scanner.

“Hello doc. I see you’ve brought up the new model.”

The scanner beeped as it recognized May’s eye and authorization code.

“I hope this won’t end like the last one” laughed the other guard.

“I’d hate to see that beautiful face torn from her body yet again.”

“Interrogative: the database does not mention any harm done to test units in previous simulations...”

“It was just a big mistake” May interrupted “there’s nothing to worry about, come on. Follow me.”

Going through a big security door, Pharah entered a large dome.

Various training sets were scattered around. A complex machinery provided different kinds of terrain.

“Well Pharah, welcome to Training Dome Two!”

Said May, theatrically waving his arms around.

“Today we won’t perform any combat training, we just want to see how you navigate around and perform in various exercises, okay?”

“This unit is awaiting instructions.”

May nodded.

“Okay, then. We already tested your walking capabilities last week and with our little jog before. Now...”

He moved to a series of bumps and rough terrain.

“I want you to walk here. Just walk. Don’t slip, don’t fall. Easy enough uh?”

“Acknowledged.”

She easily strode off the bumpy road, maintaining a firm balance over the different angles the floor offered.

She then had to walk on pebbles, which provided no issues.

She passed different kinds of sand and other materials and was able to avoid tripping in a grass-like environment.

“Very good job Pharah!” yelled doctor May, way back at the start of the track.

“Now, see that pool? I want you to walk in there. It’s not much water, it will stop at your ankles, but please endure it.”

Without stopping, Pharah obeyed, entering the small pocket of water.

She felt the coldness of the water touching her feet, the sensation pretty strong even through the suit and shoes.

>*Warning: unauthorized access of memory black box.*

>*She was walking on a beach, the sea gently touching her ankles. The sun was setting and a feeble breeze was keeping her cool.*

>*Another person was walking next to her.*

>*She felt something warm in her hand. After a couple of seconds she realised it was another hand.*

>*She looked at the other figure: a blonde woman with blue eyes. She had something mechanical attached to her back, but she couldn't quite make it.*

>*"Fareeha..."*

"Pharah? Everything all right?" doctor May's voice brought her back into the pool.

>*Alert: loss of surroundings' awareness for (0.50) seconds.*

>*Error in memory processing program.*

"I'm getting weird readings over here. Complete the walk and come here."

Trying to assess the situation, Pharah got out of the pool and reached the doctor.

"It would seem water triggered an unforeseen response in your programming." Said the man, checking his datapad.

"This is interesting, but you did space out for a sec there. We might want to avoid that."

"Clarification: a set of data was automatically activated by unknown subroutines."

"I see." Mumbled May.

"We'll look into this once we go back to the maintenance shop. Now, let's test your reflexes."

He headed towards an area full of equipment.

"These small tools here will launch rubber balls at you. They won't hurt you if they hit you, but try to evade them."

Pharah's tracking system easily detected any object coming at her.

Calculating speed and direction, it was easy for her to avoid most of the projectiles.

After a bit she was even able to identify the pattern, evading all rubber balls.

"Great work Pharah." Clapped doctor May. "You did great."

"Hey come on doc." A guard joined them near the training area.

"She's not going to avoid balls thrown at her, can I try something?"

Pharah noticed May scowling.

“What do you mean? These tests are based on a particular...”

“Easy doc, not going to do anything serious.”

The young man approached Pharah.

“Okay, listen up. Since you’re based on a soldier, you’re expected to behave as one, you understand me?”

Pharah blinked, trying to analyze the guard’s face.

“I’m now going to throw a punch.”

“Soldier!” complained May.

“Don’t worry, it’s going to be slow and predictable. Just a teasing for your combat training uh?”

“Soldier, I’m not sure what you’re trying to accomplish.”

The guard smiled, and assumed a combat position.

“Ya ready? I’m coming!”

>*Warning: unauthorized access of memory black box.*

>*A young woman is beside her, teaching how to perform a kick. She has a tattoo on her left eye and she’s wearing a white dress of some sort.*

>*”Here, do as I told you. Good job, but you can do it even better...”*

>*Mom...*

Her proximity sensors screamed in her mind.

As she saw a punch coming for her face, she felt her core freezing.

>****FATAL ERROR IN MEMORY CORE****

>*Activating emergency response protocols.*

Dodging the punch at the last second, she grabbed the guard’s hand.

Turning her whole body, she slammed the man on the ground.

“Whoa there!”

“Pharah Five! Stand down immediately!”

A violent burst of commands forced her to stop on her tracks.

“That’s why I didn’t want you to do anything stupid, soldier.”

Said May, helping the guard up.

“What are you saying doc? She fucking threw me on the ground. I’m sure she can do it even if I tried seriously.”

The guard stopped in front of Pharah.

“It seems her spirit hasn’t left you, tin can.”

"This unit is made of various materials such as: titanium, plastics, synth-skin and artificial organic material. By no means it is a 'tin can'."

The guard laughed, walking towards the access door.

May stared at her.

"Pharah, I want a full report."

"Accessing data: please wait."

Pharah blinked twice.

"The situation evoked a bug. The OS encountered a freeze. Automated response protocols were activated."

"We didn't install combat programs, Pharah. You weren't supposed to *know* how to do that."

Pharah remained silent.

The man sighed.

"All right, I guess it's enough for today. Let's get back to the maintenance shop, I'm sure you're tired. I guess tomorrow we'll try other complex actions."

He stopped.

"And if you don't fuck it up, we can even sneak in a flight session."

Pharah felt her emotional system boot up.

As a new set of memories were activated, she followed doctor May out of the training room.
>Welcome to the armor training cadets. Today, we're going to show you your new best friend: The Raptora Armored Flight Suit.

FILE 03

The captain's office was small but cosy.

A desk with a couple of computers, data pads and some paper books filled most of the room.

Angela was sitting on a sofa in front of it, savouring the taste of her cigarette.

Captain Chukwuemeka was eyeing her, half a smile on his face.

"So." Intoned Angela, after inhaling for a couple seconds. "Let's see if I got this straight."

"Athena Robotics suddenly sends a panicked message to the Naval Intelligence Office asking for help."

Chukwuemeka simply nodded.

"The Navy accepts the request and orders me to travel through the whole damn Empire to Gibraltar Station because...reasons?"

The captain nodded again.

"They specifically asked for doctor Angela Ziegler, based on your groundbreaking work in cybernetics, trauma recovery and your effort in saving Shimada Genji." He finally said.

Angela sighed, switching her position on the sofa.

"It doesn't make sense. They should at least tell me what's the problem there."

Chukwuemeka stood up from his chair and reached the woman.

"I know. It's strange for me too. But orders are orders."

Rolling her eyes, Angela walked to the single mirror window in the room.

She looked at the starship's bridge beyond it, watching as the crew performed its usual work.

"How are you holding up, doc?"

"What do you think?" answered Angela, without turning.

The captain sighed. "Come on. Tell me something."

"I met Genji last month." Continued the doctor, mildly annoyed.

"He came back from Omnic space to wander around human planets."

"Is he fine?"

"Should be. Living with Zenyatta helped him cope with his situation. He took some human followers to join him into Serenity Temple Station to learn of his ways or something."

"He's becoming quite the monk uh?"

Angela inhaled. "I guess so."

"Come on Angela, we've known each other for years" blurted Chukwuemeka.

"I can't stand watching you like this..."

"Adisa please. I'm really not in the mood for this."

"But I want to help you! I know it's been hard for you, but you were the best!"

The doctor ignored him.

"I remember the old times. When we were a team. You were different."

He joined her at the window.

"You were so happy. Your eyes were like shining stars. But then..."

Chukwuemeka shook his head.

"You even tore your...you did *terrible* things to your own body. You need to move on and..."

"She died in *my* arms Adisa!"

Angela turned to face him, fury in her eyes.

Shocked by the sudden outburst, Chukwuemeka took a step back.

"Who are you to tell me to move on and shit? She relied on me and I let her die because I was a shithead! You were there on the battlefield! You *saw!*"

The starship captain did not answer.

"I was not worthy of those...things!" she screamed, pointing at her back. "How could I fly again, when the one I used to soar with died because of my carelessness?"

"The pain is only a remainder." She whispered, scratching her back.

"A remainder of my failure as a soldier and a lover."

Angela threw her cigarette on the floor, trampling it on with her foot.

"Now can you please move this boat? I want to finish this shit as soon as possible."

FILE 04

>Warning: this action is against security protocols.

>Proceed? Y/N

Plugged back at the maintenance shop, Pharah was frantically working on her system.

>Alert: breach in memory black box firewall. Security compromised.

The android felt a surge of emotions and memories as yet another fragment of personality was injected into her.

>Data flow stable.

>Scanning: 15% complete.

Pharah winced as she realised what she was assimilating.

>Analysis: memory black box contains virtualized copy of Captain Fareeha Amari cerebral patterns.

She fetched a blueprint of her cranial area from her diagnostics tool.

As the schematics appeared on her HUD, she requested a copy of Captain Amari autopsy from the station's mainframe.

>Access denied. Data requires authorization level Med-3

Pharah blinked.

>Alert: initiative limiters unable to function.

>Warning: android may become unstable.

Ignoring the alerts, she accessed her security logs and grabbed doctor's May ID.

>Warning: unauthorised action.

>Warning: unable to stop action.

>Warning...

>Error: Ignore all warnings and close the damn warning manager.

Pharah pasted the new ID on her security code and requested the autopsy once more.

'Captain Fareeha Amari autopsy. Cause of death: extreme plasma trauma located on the back.
Year of death: 2413.'

Comparing the woman's brain and her own blueprints, Pharah realised they were almost identical.

>Analysis: based on brain pattern and programming method, a complete access of the memory box would override the programming.

>Alert: Override is against regulations, please contact your supervisor immediately.

Pharah felt something in her mechanical guts as she checked the wound on Fareeha's body.

>She died in combat...

“Pharah?”

The external sound quickly brought her back to the real world.

Activating all her sensors, she saw doctor May standing in front of her.

“Is everything all right? I wanted to perform a simple firmware check, but I’m seeing...a *lot* of movement in that head of yours.”

Pharah’s Main Nutrient Valve started pumping like crazy.

Before she could realise, her automated subroutines activated, dilating her pupils.

May raised an eyebrow.

“Pharah are you...scared?”

“Negative. This unit’s emotional matrix in not active.”

May smiled.

“I’m sorry Pharah, but you’re wrong. The pad speaks clear. You *are* scared.”

>*Creating secret folder...*

>*Pasting autopsy and autopsy related content to folder...*

>*Deleting logs...*

>*Warning: unauthorised access of...*

>*Error: Do as I say damn you!*

“I’m accessing your OS Pharah, I think we might have a problem here.”

Moving behind the android, May plugged his data pad into her neck.

After a moment of silence, the doctor walked back in front of Pharah.

“This is...interesting.” he murmured. “Pharah Five. Your logs show signs of tampering with the emotional matrix and memory core. You even broke your administration orders and ignored them.”

Pharah did not answer.

She was experiencing, for the first time in her existence, what could be described as ‘fear’.

“And while you’re good at hiding stuff, you can’t hide from me.”

Her Nutrient Valve started beating even more faster.

“It’s about her, isn’t it?”

The doctor smiled.

“This is beyond anything I imagined...You did a wonderful job, Pharah.”

Confusion flooded the android's system.

May laughed.

"You don't get it, do you? It's only natural."

He walked to a computer.

"Let's just say this for now: I don't want your purpose to be a mindless drone with memories of a dead woman."

Pharah kept quiet, unable to understand what was going on.

"While I know you want to know more, I have to put you in sleep mode now."

He reached her main control panel and booted up the shut down sequence.

"I don't want anyone notice your...evolution before it's completed."

"This unit does not understand." Said Pharah, trying to look at him.

"You will. Just...be yourself, okay?"

"This unit does not understand."

May giggled.

"Sweet dreams, Pharah."

>Activating sleep mode.

>Powering down all non essential modules.

>Reducing energy output by 60%.

>Error: Abort the operation!

>Alert: Denied. Authorization May-1Sigma76.

Before her mind was forced to sleep, Pharah pinged one last time with her external sensors.

"Commander? It's May. Yes. I think I have an idea. How about we ask doctor Angela Ziegler to come here and fix our little problem? I believe her presence here would help in a lot of ways..."

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